

Power plant cleanup wraps up

By AMY McCULLOUGH
Tribune Chronicle

WARREN — After eight years of work, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency expects the cleanup of the Mahoningside Power Plant to be complete in the next couple of months.

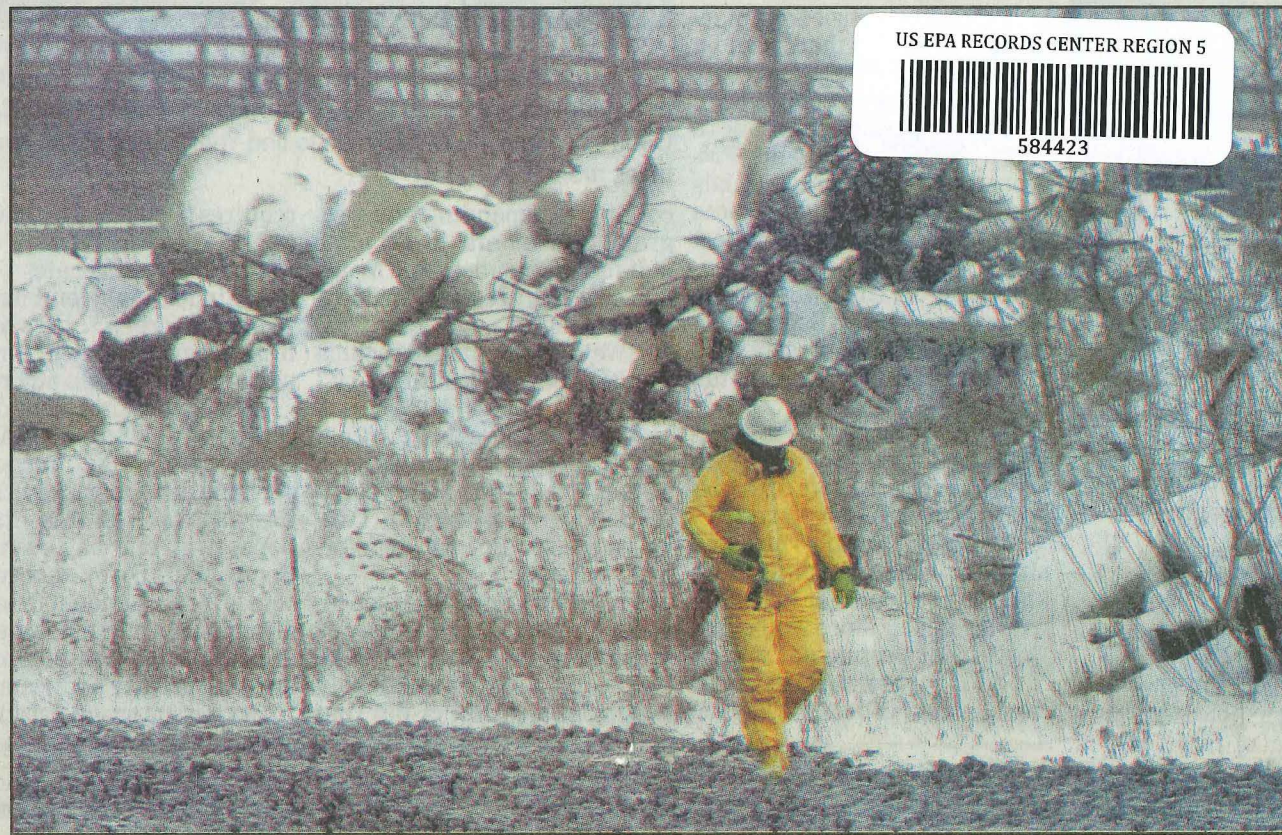
■ Time is running out for landfill.
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Mark Durno of the U.S. EPA. "We anticipate that we will be done removing the material in two to three months. If we are still here in the summer, then we had some unexpected changes."

The site, a longtime eyesore to the community and part of a federal investigation with a former city official charged with steering contracts to demolish the facility, has been in limbo for the past several years as local and federal officials have worked to clean up the facility.

The hydroelectric and coal-burning power plant, which operated in the early 1900s to the mid-1970s, was demolished by the city in 1999. Three large piles of dirt were found to be contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) a known carcinogen linked to electrical equipment such as transformers and compressors.

Durno said about 1,000 tons of material already have been removed from the site, since the cleanup work resumed in February. The EPA is authorized to spend about \$800,000 to remove the contaminants from the dirt piles, but Durno said he expects the project to cost about \$500,000 based on samples that have already been tak-



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ABOVE: A worker for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency examines part of the former Mahoningside power plant site Wednesday near the Summit Street bridge.

BELOW: Mark Durno, on-scene coordinator of EPA Region 5, speaks during a news conference about the cleanup project as Mayor Michael O'Brien looks on.

en.

The next step is to remove the last couple of piles and support the city with future assessment work, he said.

The site contains three types of materials — PCB contaminated soil, regulated asbestos and large debris, such as concrete, that most likely will be decontaminated and left on the site.

The PCB material will either be taken to a landfill in the Detroit or Buffalo area that is regulated to accept such material, and the construction and demolition debris will be taken to a landfill that is licensed to accept asbestos debris.

Durno said that workers are continually wetting down the material and taking extra precautions to prevent the asbestos material from going airborne. He said it is unlikely the material will float downwind and affect neighborhoods.

"If we see elevated levels of dust, we will probably collect some air samples, but I don't see it being a

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Council votes to pay trash bill

Warren garbage service to continue

By AMY McCULLOUGH
Tribune Chronicle

WARREN — There will be no trash piling up on the side of the road.

And the city will not face thousands of dollars in overtime costs, maintenance fees and fuel costs for driving the city's garbage out of town.

All politics and personal ill-feelings against Warren Recycling and the facility's owners were put aside Wednesday at a special call meeting at which City Council voted unanimously to pay the \$133,000 debt it owes to Warren Recycling.

The decision ensured Warren residents' garbage services will continue uninterrupted.

"We have had a problem getting some of the information regarding the question of whether money is still owed to us. We have that information in front of us now," Finance Chairman Alford Novak said. "Our first obligation is providing services to the citizens of Warren."

Even though the city's contract with Warren Recycling expired Dec. 31, 2004, the facility continued services in anticipation a new contract would be signed. Last week, a new contract was signed, but because of financial discrepancies in an auditing report presented to council, the topic stayed at the forefront of city business during the last week.

Auditor David Griffing repeatedly assured council the facility was current on all payments, but the numbers showing that were not disbursed until Wednesday. Griffing was not present at the meeting, which brought criticism from some coun-

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Workers for the EPA examine other parts of the site of the former power plant, which was demolished about five years ago.

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problem," Durno said.

Mayor Michael J. O'Brien said the site has been a top priority in his administration, and he will continue working to secure Brownfield and Clean Ohio money so future develop-

ment will remain a possibility.

"At this point, I think the residents will be happy to see the debris gone and maybe even a little bit of grass," O'Brien said. "It is exciting to note that one of the piles is out of the area, and we are working on the other two."

amccullough@tribune-chronicle.com

Bureau

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lawyer advised the board to hold off paying those obligations for the time being, as negotiations take place.

Baragona said the bureau will continue to operate its office as long as money holds out.

"We're not giving up," board member Richard Alberini said.

The bureau's efforts to promote the county to tourism will continue as they have for more than two decades, he said.

"We see that everything's been fruitful the last couple of years," Alberini added.

Pointing out that the county has landed large-scale events like a major PONY League tournament and two competition fishing tournaments for 2005, Baragona said it was astonishing that the bureau's

staff was able to accomplish what it did in light of restricted funding. Those events, the bureau said, will generate a great deal of revenue for the county in motel and restaurant use and shopping by participants in the tournaments and their families.

The bureau's lawsuit complains the county is holding more than \$323,000 in motel and hotel excise taxes that it should receive. It had been getting half of the 4 percent excise tax charged to people who book rooms.

After discovering the bureau had accumulated \$200,000 in a savings account, the commissioners diverted the bureau's 2 percent to the port authority, which was receiving the other 2 percent. The bureau has been operating on those reserves since the funding was discontinued.

jgoodall@tribune-chronicle.com

city, Bridgeport, is among those considering a purchase.

The system consists of an infrared camera that rapidly scans license plates and, connected to a laptop computer in the New Haven system, scours a list of car tax delinquents. Previously, New Haven officials had to rely on mailed notices and phone calls to try to collect overdue car taxes.

The car tax collection rate, at 80 percent before BootFinder, has now risen to 95 percent, said C.J. Cuticello, New Haven's tax collector.

"I think the results are fantastic," he said. "We're going to continue it until we exhaust every vehicle in New Haven."

Arlington County has had similar success, reaping about \$100,000 in unpaid car taxes and parking tickets since employing BootFinder despite not towing tax delinquents' cars. Its treasurer, Frank O'Leary, says the



The Associated Press

Outfitted with a laptop computer and the BootFinder, tow truck driver Jay Juliano drives last week through downtown New Haven, Conn., scanning license plates to find vehicles on which overdue taxes are owed.

county is expanding the program this month to go after delinquent business and meals taxes owed by restaurant delivery companies.

"We're expanding to include all the items we can think of," he said.

That is precisely what alarms privacy advocates such as Cedric Laurant, policy counsel for the Washington, D.C.-based Electronic Privacy Information Center.

"It's a very slippery slope into which the authorities may be tempted to go," Laurant said. "You could use that technology to enforce any type of law that

requires people to file their taxes."

Privacy advocates fear BootFinder could lend itself to "function creep," in which a technology intended for one purpose evolves into other uses.

Indeed, the president of the company that developed BootFinder, Andy Bucholz of Alexandria, Va.-based G2 Tactics, says he is in talks that he hopes will one day lead to a BootFinder-like system getting access to the National Crime Information Center database.

Bucholz said the talks are addressing privacy and security.

Such issues were paramount

"I didn't know till I went to walk my dog," Martone said.

Motorists who have had their vehicles seized say they are given little warning and must miss work to get their car back.

New Haven officials say, however, that delinquent taxpayers are given five notices and warnings before their vehicles are seized.

In Bridgeport, Mayor John Fabrizi got a demonstration of BootFinder last week and said that within five minutes he had identified three cars whose owners owed a total of \$900 in taxes.

"I was very impressed," Fabrizi said. "I feel we're going to go with the program."

The city's tax collector, Bob Tetreault, says it currently is owed more than \$20 million in car taxes and its collection rate is below 70 percent, "which is just embarrassing."

Bill

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some council members.

"I'm not saying this is all Warren Recycling's fault because believe it or not, this is very little Warren Recycling's fault," said Councilwoman Susan Hartman, D-7th Ward. "When I walked into this place today and saw that Auditor Griffing was not here ... I think it shows a total lack of respect

for this council and the people of this city."

Griffing said he could not make the meeting on such short notice because of a prior engagement.

"I do have other things that I have to do. I try to accommodate council, but when they set up these meetings at the last minute, it's hard to move your schedule around," he said.

Mayor Michael J. O'Brien said he had no doubt the figures could be reconciled "if, in fact,

there is a difference" and told council he would consider the possibility of a special audit from the state.

However, he also reminded council that such requests can come with an extensive price tag.

Novak said he plans to invite the state auditor to a future council meeting to discuss the pros and cons of such an audit.

Griffing said he stands by his figures and says such a request

would just serve as a drain on city taxpayers.

"It's just like the last time they tried to do a special audit for insignificant things. The information I gave tonight showed they (Warren Recycling) actually paid more than what Mrs. Hartman thought we should have gotten, therefore, to look at it further would be a waste of taxpayers' money," Griffing said.

amccullough@tribune-chronicle.com

Casinos

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Petro said he would issue an opinion once he reviews the agreements.

Jason Earnhart, assistant Trumbull County prosecutor, said the contract Trumbull County and Lordstown are negotiating with the Eastern Shawnee is contingent on the tribe actually building a casino, not on Ohio approving class III gambling.

Earnhart said Petro is welcome to see the contract when it is completed, which should be any day now. Lordstown Mayor Michael Chaffee said he expects Village Council to give it first

nounced gaming resorts in Lorain, Botkins and Monroe.

The agreement between Trumbull County, Lordstown and the tribe would provide an estimated \$4 million from net proceeds from the slot machines. Earnhart said the proposed 15-year deal calls for the county, village and Lordstown schools to get 1.5 percent of net slots revenue for five years and 2 percent in the following years. It could be renewed for an additional 15 years.

Chaffee said he would feel better if Petro had seen the contract before talking about whether it is constitutional. The thing that bothers him the most, Chaffee said, is Gov. Bob Taft, the Legislature, Petro and other

recognition as an Ohio tribe, establishing Indian lands in Ohio and negotiating a compact that the General Assembly and the governor would have to approve.

While the Eastern Shawnee said the Lordstown casino could open in 2 1/2 years if all goes right, Petro said getting federal recognition alone could take many, many years.

Casey said Petro's reaction the Eastern Shawnee plan is in large part personal, because he opposes the expansion of gambling in Ohio. It is also a large part political because Petro is running for governor, Casey said, plus a small part legal research into the issue.

Casey said the Eastern

disclosure."

The Roundtable also urged the General Assembly to stop negotiating with the Eastern Shawnee and respect two statewide votes that rejected casino gambling.

State Rep. Randy Law, R-Warren, who was involved early on in the Eastern Shawnee proposal, said he thinks lawmakers need to be part of any negotiations to make sure they make the right decision about casino gambling.

Law said most lawmakers back expanded gambling in general, but he doubts there is a majority at this point that would specifically back the Eastern Shawnee plan or any of several other proposals to ex-

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